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FOLK-LORE SCRAP-BOOK.

ITALIAN MARIONETTE THEATRE IN BROOKLYN, N. Y. — The following account of a visit to this theatre was read by Mr. Stewart Culin at a recent meeting of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Folk-Lore Society.

It was my fortune some months since, while wandering through the foreign quarter of the city of Brooklyn, whither I had gone with the hope of picking up some stray piece of folk-lore, to see displayed over the doorway of a little one-story wooden building a rude picture representing what appeared to be a mediæval tourney, with the legend, "Teatro dei Marionetti."

It was in the centre of the Italian quarter of South Brooklyn, on Union Street, one of those great arteries of travel from the New York ferries, through which, at the time of my visit, thousands of people, mostly Italians, were returning from their day's work in the metropolis. The shop signs along the street invariably bore Italian names; the shop windows were filled with strings of garlic, sausages and dried chestnuts, and that assortment of curious and uninviting wares characteristic of the Italian shops in our cities, while the crowd of street urchins who endeavored to answer my inquiries about the little theatre showed in their olive complexions and liquid eyes the nationality of their parents.

After some delay, the proprietor of the establishment made his appearance. He spoke no English, I no Italian; but through the mediation of one of the liquid-eyed boys he informed me that his name was Carlo Comardo, that he was a native of Palermo, and that his theatre was one of two such theatres in the United States, the other being in Boston.

The performance began at seven o'clock, and the audience had already commenced to assemble, but circumstances did not permit me, much as I desired, to remain. Before leaving, however, Signor Comardo insisted that I should at least see the interior of the theatre. The lamps were lighted, disclosing an auditorium with a seating capacity of at least one hundred people. Then the drop curtain was raised. This curtain bore a rude but very spirited picture of two mounted knights engaged in deadly combat, and revealed a stage some six feet wide by as many deep, set to represent a wood, within which, conveniently suspended from wires overhead, appeared three of the personages who would figure in the evening's performance. They were puppets, quite two feet in height, representing knights in complete armor, with shields and breastplates and helmets, all cleverly wrought in polished brass.

Signor Comardo dwelt with much pride upon the many excellences of his theatre. There were four voices, two for male and two for female parts. The puppets numbered over one hundred. The *répertoire* was most extensive. At present he was playing the story of Carlo Magno, and he produced in explanation a well thumbed book of several hundred printed pages, through which he said they were progressing, night after night, from the beginning to the end. During his explanation the boys who accompanied me formed a kind of chorus. You should see the horse! You

should see the fight ! Every figure cost ten dollars and some even more ! The time approached for the performance to commence, and I reluctantly bade farewell to Signor Comardo, after promising to return some night when I had time to witness the play.

This promise I kept. A few weeks since, in company with a fellow member of this society, I again visited the theatre. It was quite late, and the evening's performance was more than half over when we entered the little room. The high tiered seats were crowded with men and boys, all with eyes fixed in rapt attention upon the stage. Here was a most gorgeous spectacle. The space was almost filled with mail-clad knights, while others, brilliant in silk and gold, were constantly wheeling in with solemn motion from the wings. One of the knights, with appropriate gestures, addressed his comrades. Thereupon, one by one, solemnly they wheeled off again, leaving the stage deserted. A moment's pause, and one of the figures reappeared. He walked with a long martial stride, and held a sword above his head. Then he cried in a husky voice, three times. At the third cry another figure strode from the opposite side. His visor was down, and his sword was raised. In a moment they were at it, steel against steel.

Clash ! clash ! went the swords ; clash ! bang ! as the blades glanced from the shining armor, across the stage and back again, until even I, at first coolly critical, forgot the strings and the poker-like irons with which the little figures were moved, and waited, breathless, for the outcome. Of course, there was but one result. The champion, for so he proved, at last overcame his opponent, who fell with a crash at full length, and was ignominiously dragged off. Almost instantly another combatant appeared. He was disposed of in the same manner as the first, and so on through a long line of warriors, distinguished by greater or less ferocity of visage, until the entire troop appeared to have been exhausted. The play continued with another assembly and more parleyings. From time to time the scene was changed by a sudden lowering of curtains at the back and side. Now it was a forest, and now the court-yard of a palace ; but the action was always the same and always culminated in terrific single combats.

At the conclusion of one of these the drop curtain was lowered, and afterwards a short farce was played by three hideous puppets, at which the entire audience broke into loud laughter and applause.

At the conclusion of the play I went, with my colleague, behind the scenes, and, while he was conversing with the manager, had an opportunity to inspect the little company. They were a queer lot. Kings and queens, beggars and priests and ballerini, with long, tapering pink legs, all hanging by wires on the walls or piled in heaps around. Signor Comardo affably presented us on our departure with a hand-bill, with a translation of which interesting piece of folk-literature I will conclude : —

“PUPPET SHOW. — History of the Paladins of France, beginning with Milo, Count of Anglante, down to the death of Rinaldo.

“In the present history are described the sufferings of France in the time of Charlemagne, and the strange adventures which the Paladins had to undergo. They, fighting with the Infidels or for the sake of love, were